National Proverbs

Serbia

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NATIONAL PROVERBS

SERBIA

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NATIONAL PROVERBS:

SERBIA

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THE Proverbs of a Nation are not only an epitome of its wisdom, but crystallise for us much of its national temperament and popular habits of thought. Nowhere, perhaps can what are regarded as the national traits be so compactly presented as in these saws and proverbs. In the preparation of the present series the utmost care has been taken to unearth those sayings which are in danger of falling into disuse, and are not widely known. The commonplace Proverbs have, in most cases, been rejected; little-known sources have been investigated, and everything possible done to give, in each case, the cream of the available material. The Editors will be very grateful to hear of any good but little-known Proverbs which readers may be able to add to the present collections.

It should be mentioned that the present volume of Serbian Proverbs has been selected by Miss K. Amy Turner and that much valuable assistance in the compilation was generously given by the eminent Serbian scholar, M. W. M. Petrovitch, Attaché to the Serbian Legation in London.

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National Proverbs

GOD does not pay every Saturday.

When the sun shines on me I think but little of the moon.

Tell the truth and make thyself scarce.

The just man laughs and the guilty hides himself.

No trade without tools.

National Proverbs

Where right is of no use wrong will not avail.

Who does not keep a cat keeps mice.

No resolution without discussion.

The miser ends by giving more, and the lazy man by going further.

What is play to horses is death to donkeys.

Serbia

When big bells ring, little ones are not heard.

The sun shines on dirt and is unsullied.

Let the cock cross the threshold and he will perch upon the table.

Pride swells with flattery.

When Winter does not bite with his teeth he beats with his tail.

National Proverbs

What is the good of being able to buy a fortress for a *para* if you have no *para*.

What is taken by force is cursed.

Cæsar is Cæsar without a penny, and the donkey is always a donkey, even when covered with cloth of gold.

The plague is better than a south wind at Christmas.

Serbia

A tailless cock is but a chicken.

If one cannot attain wealth or good looks one can surely be good and honest.

It is easy with a full belly to praise fasting.

Who owns the shore, owns the sea; who owns the plain is master of the fortress.

National Proverbs

What Winter tears, Summer does not see.

One devil does not scratch out another devil's eyes.

Beat the bad and he becomes worse.

Even the Emperor cannot feast from an empty dish.

Better suffer injustice than commit it.

Serbia

An ugly man does not often look into the glass.

Corn will not wait for a working day.

He who drowns in a puddle needs no other sea.

Feed your horse like a brother, but ride him like an enemy.

Good reputation is worth more than a golden belt.

National Proverbs

When there is war, they cry, "Where is now Kraljević Marko?"

When the plunder is being divided, they say, "Whence come you, O unknown warrior?"

Better ever than never.

He who weeps for the world will soon have no eyes.

He who is first booted and spurred will command.

Serbia

It is hard to feed the satiated, and to make a present to the rich.

Where water once has flowed it will flow again.

A frog saw the horse being shod and lifted up his foot also.

The wind blows strongest just before it drops.

Bargain like a gipsy and pay like a gentleman.

National Proverbs

As long as a man does not dishonour himself, nobody can dishonour him.

Eyes can see everything except themselves.

Warriors in times of peace are like fires in Summer.

Let your son marry when you please, and your daughter when you can.

Who judges hastily will repent quickly.

Ask the wolf when it is coldest, and he will answer, "When the sun rises."

He who burns his mouth and does not tell the company that the soup is hot, is no honourable man.

A man wishes to be better than everybody but his own son.

National Proverbs

Better a Turk after you with the sword than a German after you with the pen.

Big fish are caught in deep waters.

No one need pray for either rain or death—both will surely come.

Hungry hounds make good hunting.

Better a bad harvest than a bad neighbour.

Serbia

Either knock a pot against a stone or a stone against a pot, woe to the pot anyhow! (*Montenegro*).

When two fish are cooked at the same fire, each thinks he is the only sufferer.

Lightning strikes no nettles.

When a Serbian is satiated he does not think of to-morrow.

Belief is easier than investigation.

National Proverbs

Work as if thou art to live a hundred years, and pray to God as if thou art to die to-morrow.

Where wolves are full, sheep are few.

A honourable effort is never lost.

Everyone likes to dress in red and ride a white horse. (An aristocrat).

If the day be short the year is long.

Serbia

Everybody acts in his own way, and the donkey as he is driven.

Shake not the tree when the fruit is falling by itself.

Patching and moderate deprivation sustain the household.

He who is not at the division gets no share.

Praise the sea and keep on the hill.

National Proverbs

The unjustly acquired wealth never reaches the third generation.

He who goes for others' wool comes home shorn himself.

When everybody says you are drunk, lie down even if you are sober.

It is difficult to steal from a thief.

You cannot take two skins from one goat.

Serbia

No wealth without health.

He shall pay for it as dearly as a wolf with his skin.

The apple which ripens late keeps longer.

When God gives happiness he does not ask whose son you are.

God has woollen feet and iron hands. (You do not hear him coming but you feel his blows).

National Proverbs

It is better to carry an empty sack than to have the devil in it.

When your devil was born mine was already dancing the Kolo ! (I am not to be taken in).

A cow may be black, but her milk is white.

Where the devil does not succeed, he sends an old woman.

He who does ill must suffer ill.

Serbia

Even the devil knows what is right, but he will not do it.

He who does well will never repent.

If one cannot do as one wishes, one does as one can.

The vineyard needs no prayers, but a hoe.

Not in eating, but in doing evil is sin.

National Proverbs

There is a curse on stolen goods.

The barking of young dogs is carried away by the wind.

A victory is won, not by shining arms, but by brave hearts.

Man goes through the world like a bee among flowers.

He who works gains, but he who saves gains more.

Serbia

He who buys what he does not want will end by selling what he wants.

Keep bright money for dull days.

Who spends much will soon beg.

It is not the shining sword that fights the fight, but the heart of the hero.

Be on your guard against a smoke-blackened gun.

National Proverbs

Work is for men and thrift for women.

Drops excavate stones.

Who does not mend the old will never wear the new.

It is better to weep with the wise than to sing with the fool.

The fools build houses and the wise buy them when ready.

Serbia

You cannot fill a torn sack.

The best swimmer is often drowned.

A thorn pierces young skin more quickly than old.

There are more lambs in the market than sheep-skins.

The mother of a hero is the first to weep.

National Proverbs

When you have eaten another's fowl, make your own fast by the feet.

When the house is burning, the debts fly away with the smoke.

A dead man pays no debts.

A drunkard is not he who drinks much, but he who gets drunk.

He who drinks and pays not must not return to the tavern.

Serbia

He hates him as much as God hates devils.

There is no corn without tares.

He who wars with the King carries trouble homewards.

Woe to the hornless goat making war on horned ones.

The house is not too small if the guests are not mad.

National Proverbs

Where there is no fear of God there is no shame of men.

Who follows everyone does wrong, who follows no one does worse.

When God will not help, all the saints cannot help.

The more the eggs, the thicker the soup.

One hand washes the other, and both the face.

Serbia

It is better to love from afar than to hate near by.

A cackling hen lays but few eggs.

When it thunders loudest it rains least.

Three removals are as bad as one fire.

Where there are no dogs the wolves howl.

National Proverbs

Were there no fools in this world the wise could not live in it.

It is better to be a bull for a year than a cow for a hundred years.

Woe to the house without a master, and to the hearth without logs.

Woe to the master of the house whom the servant teaches.

A dog neither eats bones nor lets anybody else.

Serbia

When a man spits in the air his spittle falls on his own face.

Do not praise day before night.

One refuses to embrace the guest who comes too often.

The Tzigans (gipsies) cannot have a festival without some fighting.

With whom you are, such one you are.

National Proverbs

Man gives all for honour, but honour at no price.

A lie has short legs.

A lie stands on slippery ground.

Whatever Kolo you begin, dance it through.

A good reputation is better than a golden girdle.

Serbia

A good reputation goes far, but a bad one goes still farther.

Better be extirpated than leave bad decendants.

I would rather you walked over my grave than over my body.

Every gipsy praises his own horse.

All yours are not holy, neither are mine all damned.

National Proverbs

What is wanted in the house is not given to the church.

The shirt is nearer than the coat.

He drives the wind from his house with his hat.

If we are brothers our purses are not sisters.

Eat and drink with your own people, but do no business with them.

Serbia

The eye of the owner makes the horse fat.

Save me from my family ; I will protect myself from my enemies.

You may boast to strangers, but tell the truth to your own people.

There are as many good step-mothers as there are white crows.

Better a sparrow in the hand than a falcon in the forest.

National Proverbs

Oat bread to-day is better than cake to-morrow.

The figs on the other side of the hedge are sweeter.

He who takes off his hat to every unimportant person soon grows bald.

The place of an unbidden guest is outside the door.

A fine coat hides an empty belly.

Serbia

A good friend is worth more than a bad brother.

When coins rattle philosophers are silent.

What a fool mixes up a hundred wise men cannot undo.

It is better to strip his person in the street than to rob his house.

Though we live in a stable we do not eat hay.

National Proverbs

Give the priest what is the priest's, and the king what is the king's, and then flee.

Trust not the smiles of the great, nor a bright sky, both change in an instant.

Great lords and dogs do not close the door behind them.

A Turk can be sometimes a good fellow, but it is better to hang him.

Serbia

The tongue of a woman is sharper than a Turkish sabre.

The rich man eats when it seems good to him, and the poor when he can.

He barks like a dog at the moon.

God is high and the Emperor far away.

A little happiness is worth much reason.

National Proverbs

The worst sucking-pig finds the best pears.

If you wish for peace, be ready for war.

Twice only in his lifetime is a man glad—when he marries and again when he buries his wife.

You can get to Constantinople by asking the way.

The tongue has no bones.

Serbia

What four eyes see will be seen by four-and-twenty.

What is not said cannot be heard.

Three hundred things at night and nothing in the morning.

They are fools who rely on promises.

The mole works underground, but cannot remain hidden.

National Proverbs

There is no stronger castle than a poor man.

Age and poverty cannot be hidden.

Even mice do not go to an empty house.

Covetousness is the world's peace-breaker.

Before an empty glass no need of grace.

Serbia

He who never had anything is not poor, but he who has had and lost.

A barking dog saves the village.

Weigh your words, do not count them.

He who says what he likes must often hear what he does not like.

The tongue hurts more than the sword.

National Proverbs

The devil is tormented by silence.

He who barks at the stars loses his teeth.

Help yourself and God will help you.

It is easy to take a wife, but hard to get rid of her.

All comes in time to him who waits.

Serbia

He who is a hero, has powder enough—he who is no hero, will never want any.

For every waggon load of wisdom there are two of stupidity.

It is easier to roll stones up a mountain than to talk to a fool.

Donkey to Rome—donkey back from Rome.

A misfortune never comes alone.

National Proverbs

Do not anger him from whom you want favours.

Polite words open iron gates.

Man learns as long as he lives and then dies ignorant.

No candle is wanted to look for a fool.

The larger the head the greater the pain.

Serbia

He who warms himself by the fire must first put up with the smoke.

He who has not served cannot command.

Be on the watch when an old dog barks.

It is a bad mouse which has only one way of escape.

He who goes slowly gets home first.

National Proverbs

Measure twice before you cut.

Who goes to bed early and marries young will never repent.

The fox fears the early riser and not him who wanders at night.

He who rises early is rewarded doubly.

What satisfies the pig also fattens him.

Serbia

The hungry man has no eyes.

Any water suits a thirsty horse.

Hunger drives the wolf to the village.

Reproach is worse than death.

A still river washes its banks away.

Beware of the coal under cinders.

National Proverbs

There is no wealth without pouring out one purse into another.

Beware of a dog which does not bark.

The gaily coloured hen is not always the best layer.

Pretty girls dance the Kolo while ugly girls look after the house.

A clean pig makes lean bacon.

Serbia

One does not wait for Christmas Eve to prepare the Christmas dinner.

The pearl is small, but the noblest wear it.

Marry by your ears and not your eyes.

Blame a man where he can hear you, and praise him where he cannot.

The ploughman has black hands but white bread.

He need not wait his turn who holds the glass.

He who has never seen a church bows before a stove.

Of what use is a cow which gives a bucketful of milk and kicks it over.

Serbia

Large trees grow slowly and fall suddenly.

Go to the rich for empty honours and to the poor for hospitality.

God knows whose oil burns in the lamp.

What is stronger than iron? Rust that eats it.

Neither cut down all the forest nor go home without any wood.

National Proverbs

To-day we are, to-morrow we are not (i.e. to-day is ours, to-morrow God's).

If you do not know what is salted, you will at least know what is hot.

Man is harder than a rock and more fragile than an egg.

The spider gets poison from the flowers and the bee sucks honey.

Serbia

An empty knapsack is heavier to carry than a full one.

It is easy to make an orphan weep but hard to clothe him.

Poverty and a cough cannot be hidden.

Better that death should carry thee off than the tear of a poor man fall upon thee.

Woe to the sick in an empty house.

National Proverbs

A woman reflects her husband in her face, and a man's wife is known by his shirt.

Look at the mother before affiancing the daughter.

The wound heals, the scar remains.

Keep to new ways and old friends.

Let him who dreads the sparrows sow no oats.

Serbia

He who joins the Kolo must be sure of his feet.

A priest is not chosen by the length of his beard.

Let him who fears the frost plant no vineyards.

He who rests in the shade in Summer hungers in Winter.

A wolf changes his coat but never his nature.

National Proverbs

Crop a dog's ears he remains a dog; dock his tail and he is a dog still.

Has the owl ever hatched a hawk?

Let a mother be ever so bad, she wishes her daughter to be good.

Who owns the cake may wield the knife.

So many villages so many customs.

Serbia

A married daughter is but a neighbour.

It is easy to be generous with the goods of others.

A guest will not know what fasting means.

One does not feel twenty-five strokes of a stick on a stranger's back.

Once is better than never.

National Proverbs

Things look larger in a stranger's hands.

It is better to be beaten soundly than killed.

A bad year has little fruit, and distress but few friends.

Gaudy apparel does not hide disgrace.

He who associates with bad people is always pitying himself.

Serbia

Better retire in honour than advance in disgrace.

Every cow licks its own calf.

Better the grave than slavery.

A man in prison does not count his debts.

He who drinks wine will get drunk, he who rides a horse will sometimes fall.

A large family—quick help.

National Proverbs

He who does not listen to men is no man.

Where concord reigns there is God's blessing.

A good sheep bleats but little and gives much wool.

Priest and peasant together know more than the priest alone.

Go behind a golden carriage and you may find a golden nail.

Serbia

There is no heroism without comrades.

Little brooks make big rivers.

A bad woman does not return what she borrows, and a good one returns it twofold.

He who often threatens takes vengeance but rarely.

Where there is no hedge the ground goes to ruin.

National Proverbs

Blood is not water.

Dogs howl round empty churches.

A dull vinegar and a lenient master are good for nothing.

Where there is no father there is no food.

Where the dog drinks there he barks.

The master does not ask the donkey if he may load him.

Serbia

As long as there is refuse there will be dogs.

A servant should know and hear much and speak little.

Every bird has a hawk above it.

It is easier to take care of sheep than money.

If dogs had their way there would be no horses.

National Proverbs

It is better to be envied than pitied.

A mother does not weep for him who has not kept the fast but for the dead.

Do good even if you throw it into the water.

He who rejoices over the sorrow of strangers must expect sorrow himself.

Better win bran than lose gold.

Serbia

He who talks of rights should never milk a cow.

May God help the cunning, the just man needs not his help.

Has anyone returned from the other world with a broken head?

God must strike the guilty or the innocent would have perished long since.

God is no man's debtor.

National Proverbs

God's will is stronger than the Emperor's.

He who is not satisfied with a full spoon will never be satisfied with the scrapings.

It is better to die ten times on a journey than once at home. (False reports).

No harder work than a quarrelsome temper.

Serbia

Excellence is no distinction among the excellent.

The glory of ancestors should not prevent a man winning glory for himself.

It is better to die in honour than to live in shame.

It is better to lose your head than to burden your soul with sin.

In every house there is smoke.

National Proverbs

I shall die, but my soul will be no easy prey to the devil.

The fearless man is the first to be wounded.

It is an ill face which wine cannot warm.

Brandy knows not the Cadi ; if the Cadi knew brandy he would swear by it instead of the Koran.

Wolves need no larder.

Serbia

A cock is king of his own dung-hill.

Every man knows the lining of his own cloak.

It is better to be a ruler of little than a servant in a castle.

He who can be independent should never be subject to anyone.

One can escape from slavery but not from the grave.

National Proverbs

It is hard to serve in a strange house but harder still to earn one.

Better own a lazy horse than borrow a spirited one.

Even the fingers on a hand are not equal.

Whom the cat caresses, him he also scratches.

It is better to quarrel with good people than to consort with bad.

Serbia

Rely on yourself and on your own horse.

The best inheritance is unmortgaged ground.

He who wishes me good is my brother.

Grant, O God, that I lose not my brother, neither let me be dependent on him.

Better be in debt than in shame.

National Proverbs

He who has no hawk must make shift with a cuckoo.

Help me to bear my burden but let me speak my mind.

Avoid an angry woman or a bad companion or they will insult you.

A tired fox finds his tail heavy.

Let him who feasts with the wolf take his dog with him.

Serbia

He who takes more in his mouth than he can swallow will choke himself.

Better turn back half way than go on to a bad end.

There are no brothers in times of war.

The quail is very small but can tire both horse and rider.

Trust not horses or weapons.

The saddle is a burden to the bad horse.

Do not measure the wolf's tail till he be dead.

You cannot carry two water melons under one arm.

Money should always be counted even when found in the roadway.

He who goes further than his strength may break his shin.

Serbia

The wise man cannot recover the stone which the fool threw into the well.

What a fool buys a hundred wise men cannot sell.

A bald man wears a fine cap.

When you send a fool on a journey follow him at once.

You may not carry your thanks in your knapsack.

National Proverbs

More people die of eating and drinking than of hunger and thirst.

He is not deceived who sees the deception.

Where the army passes there is no grass.

Woe to the village through which an army passes.

He who has been bitten by a snake is afraid of lizards.

Serbia

Peace pays what war gains.

A dark night has no witnesses.

A greyhound forced to hunt catches no hare.

The crooked Drina cannot be made straight by a shove of the shoulder.

You cannot cover the sun with the palm of your hand.

National Proverbs

May he who asks for war have it in his own home.

Avoid fools as if they were saints.

The fool boasts of that of which the wise man is ashamed.

If you do not meet with happiness you will never catch her.

He who spares the guilty wrongs the innocent.

Serbia

The hungry eye does not sleep.

To water and wickedness there is no end.

Do not ask the way of a blind man, nor counsel of a fool.

Give to a child, but promise him nothing. Do the same with a Turk.

Only a simpleton relies on promises.

National Proverbs

It were sad did all barking dogs bite.

As the nest, so the bird—As the father, so the child.

Do not trust the seed till it is housed, nor a woman until she is in the grave.

One learns to know men when they drink, and horses when they work in the mire.

Serbia

A man may go when he pleases to his own orchard.

When wine comes to an end, so does conversation ; when money comes to an end so do friends.

The gods also are with him who has a following.

There is no summer until St. George's Day, and no brother until the mother bear him.

National Proverbs

Every one draws the water to his own mill.

Give me a comrade who will weep with me—one who laughs with me I can easily find for myself.

Woman can keep only those secrets of which they know nothing.

Mend the hole while it is small.

Serbia

He who rests in the Summer, starves in the Winter.

He who cannot take care of the goods of others, will never have goods of his own.

He who would rest when old, must work when young.

Losses teach men wisdom.

Tree leans on tree in the forest—and man on man in national life.

National Proverbs

Good luck is better than brains.

God shuts one door to open a hundred.

A sick person eats but little and spends much.

He who sits among the rubbish must not be surprised if pigs devour him.

Quick to believe is quickly deceived.

Serbia

Rather than old customs should perish let the village be destroyed.

Even singing requires some effort.

Debt is a bad companion.

A wise man goes slowly but arrives surely at his goal.

A cheerful heart spins much flax.

Without health, no wealth.

National Proverbs

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